

# *Schindler's List* Revisited

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## Abstract

*Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg and released in 1993, recounted the true story of Oskar Schindler, a member of the Nazi party and war profiteer, who saved over a thousand Jews during World War II. Since then, other, likewise mainstream, films dealing with the Holocaust have been released, provoking some critical discussion but very little compared to the heated debate that followed the release of Spielberg's film. Leaving aside this initial skeptical reaction, this paper studies the film's moral content and our engagement with it. Specifically, the examination of *Schindler's List* in this paper notes the moral character of the film, and the way it touches upon the audience's moral consciousness. First, the production of this movie is discussed, and the intentions of the director are outlined as the point of origin of the text's narrative ethics. Second, the way in which the film presents its story is considered, and especially the moral limits that seem to inform certain narrative and aesthetic choices. Third, the examination turns to the way in which the representation of children in the film functions as a moral catalyst for the audience's response. It is concluded that, *Schindler's List* is a film with an intense moral message, that requests the audience's moral attention through its formal and thematic composition.

*Keywords:* memory, Holocaust, trauma, testimony, aesthetics.

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## Introduction

The film *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg and released in 1993, recounted the true story of Oskar Schindler, a member of the Nazi party and war profiteer, who saved over a thousand Jews during World War II. The film was an adaptation of Thomas Keneally's 1982 Booker Prize winning novel by the same title, a historical fiction based on the testimonies of those saved by Schindler.

Scathing criticism accompanied the film's release; several prominent critics rejected the movie on the grounds that it trivialized the Holocaust, while others reacted negatively to the liberties the narrative had taken with the facts of the story. As Elazar Barkan noted in 1994, "Perhaps more hyperbolic statements have been voiced in response to Spielberg's *Schindler's List* over the last year than any other historically informed film"

(1247).<sup>1</sup> And yet, despite this initial controversy, the film went on to receive seven Academy Awards, while its commercial success paved the way for more films about the Holocaust, such as *Life is Beautiful*, *Jakob the Liar*, *The Grey Zone*, *The Pianist*, *Amen*, and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. One could even argue that it popularized, more than any other film before it, the 'Holocaust' film genre.

But what justifies a discussion about *Schindler's List* so many years later? What is the benefit of one more analysis? The passage of time certainly places the initial controversy into perspective and allows us to examine the film's aesthetic and moral value in a different context. As Miriam Hansen suggests, *Schindler's List* is "an aesthetic attempt to engage the extreme difficulty (though not absolute impossibility) of giving sensory expression to an experience that radically defies sense" (306). If indeed this film constitutes such a challenging and complex moral enterprise, and I use the term "moral" here in a broad sense, then its study as a work of art will be worth undertaking. In other words, what I propose is an examination of *Schindler's List* as an aesthetic object rather than as "entertainment."

In his book *Cinematic Ethics*, Robert Sinnerbrink outlines the importance of exploring film in moral terms, in terms of the medium's "potential to evoke ethical experience and invite philosophical reflection" (ch.1). The relationship between ethical concerns and artistic forms of expression is of course a long and complicated one. Ever since Plato's rejection of the moral value of poetry in his *Republic*, philosophers of art have debated the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, its nature and necessity, benefits and limitations.

How then to proceed with this inquiry? Is it possible to describe and assess the moral content of this film? Sinnerbrink addresses the question partly by considering the nature of the relationship between film and philosophy, placing special emphasis on the ethical potential of cinema. As he writes, "cinema has always been an art form concerned with the human figure in action, the individual in relation to the community, the human being against nature, or the interpersonal world of psychological and emotional conflict" (ch. 1). It is in this sense that the narrative film acquires moral significance and must be thus explicated and discussed.

Sinnerbrink also observes that such an approach has been noticeably absent from philosophical discourse about cinema, as scholars have mostly been focusing on ontological and epistemological topics. However, this seems to be changing, he says, as the past decade has witnessed explorations of cinema from an ethical perspective: "film theory, philosophy of film, and film-philosophy, have not only begun to explore the question of ethics, but could be described as undergoing an 'ethical turn'-along with other areas of the humanities-in reflecting upon cinema as a distinctive way of thinking through

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note Miriam Hansen's observation that a number of critics had paid very little, if any, attention to the film itself, ignoring its cinematographic quality and focusing instead on an assumed transgression (306). Additionally, Eric Sterling in "All Rules Barred: A Defense of Spielberg's *Schindler's List*" reviews some of the most noted criticisms raised at the time (62-71).

ethical concerns” (ch. 1). A similar trend is also noted in philosophical discourse about art. Specifically, Noël Carroll points out that “the relation of art to morality is a topic that has received and continues to receive scant attention” and that the study of morality in art, which has been absent in post-WWII analytic philosophy of art, needs to be finally attended to (*Beyond Aesthetics* 294). For him, philosophers should be contributing meaningfully in this area, “within the context of renewed interest in the moral dimension of art” (294). This paper then, is an attempt to study *Schindler’s List*’s as a work that engages the audience’s moral attention and leads us to reflect on the nature of moral action.

What would such an inquiry entail? The approach here will center on an examination of the film’s form and possible content.<sup>2</sup> The operating assumption is that if in a work of art the artist has found a satisfying match between form, content and “attitude,” then this attitude might influence us to such an extent that we may adopt it in our own lives. As Richard Eldridge argues, “Works of art, through the appropriateness to one another of their forms and contents, can bring us to feel that it is appropriate to regard certain phenomena—including such things as human actions or political systems or social policies—with horror or exultation, and such feelings can be politically important” (251).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, a film whose form and content interface to produce affect may be thought of as a film with moral importance. Eldridge proposes that when there is satisfying appropriateness between a certain form and content, “against the background of the history of forms and content,” this matching makes new sense to us (247); we come to understand very clearly what is being expressed. The potential of making new sense in this way is plausibly important because it shows that there is always a possibility of making sense of the world and of one another. Martha Nussbaum echoes a similar thought on the subject of literature: “form and style are not incidental features. A view of life is *told*. The telling itself—the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader’s sense of life—all of this expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life’s relations and connections” (5). And in the process of attaining this type of moral and reflective attention, understanding a work “can itself simultaneously be a process of deepening one’s own moral understanding” (Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics* 285).

Carroll delineates the ways in which certain narratives engage our moral attention because of what they are. Although he does not argue in favor of a universal ethical approach to art, he does remark on texts which offer themselves to such analysis: “art works such as these are expressly designed to elicit moral reactions, and it is part of the

<sup>2</sup> Philosophical discussion on the nature of form and content in art has been traditionally complex and varied. For the purposes of this paper I will maintain a general approach to these terms, mostly as defined in Noël Carroll’s book *Engaging the Moving Image*, in the chapter “Film Form: An Argument for a Functional Theory.”

<sup>3</sup> Monroe C. Beardsley makes a similar claim: “when our attention is held by an aesthetic object and we are taken in hand by it, so to speak, we do often feel a remarkable kind of *clarification*, as though the jumble in our minds were being sorted out” (549-550).

form of life to which they belong that audiences respond morally to them on the basis of their recognition that that is what they are intended to do, given the relevant social practices" (*Beyond Aesthetics* 279). Carroll points out that interpretation from an ethical standpoint does not necessarily yield newly found knowledge; rather, it activates what is already present. This he describes as a "clarificationist" view, where "the artworks in question can deepen our moral understanding by, among other things, encouraging us to apply our moral knowledge and emotion to specific cases. For in being prompted to apply and engage our antecedent moral powers, we may come to augment them" (*Beyond Aesthetics* 283). Indeed, given its historical subject matter which centers on an active moral protagonist, *Schindler's List* seems to be such a case.

The discussion of *Schindler's List* in this paper notes the moral character of the film, and the way it touches upon the audience's moral consciousness.<sup>4</sup> First, I will discuss the production of this movie, and outline the intentions of the director as the point of origin of the text's narrative ethics. Second, I will examine the way in which the film presents its story and note the moral limits put forth by the narrative. Third, I will examine the way in which the representation of children in the film functions as a moral catalyst for the audience's response. The study of these areas will delineate the film's moral content and our engagement with it.

### Spielberg's Intention

One concern voiced at the time of the film's release was that Steven Spielberg was not a suitable director for it, his artistic identity posing a kind of moral obstacle in the telling of this story. As Clifford Marks and Robert Torry point out, "[w]hen Spielberg decided to narrate a Holocaust story, he was the premier Hollywood director of "entertaining" movies, a talent that made him one of the most powerful man in his industry. He had not, however, solidified his reputation as a serious filmmaker" (53). Indeed, how could the filmmaker responsible for such blockbusters as *Jaws* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* make a film about one of the bleakest pages of world history? As film critic Simon Louvish noted, "Was this to be a *Jurassic Park* with Nazis replacing T-Rex and Raptosaurus?" (12). Spielberg's blockbuster credentials meant that the Holocaust was in danger of becoming just another theme park, subjected to the for-profit values of entertainment and Hollywood spectacle, of merchandising and sequels.

The decision to make the film did not come easy to Spielberg. He admits in interviews that it was not an obvious or easy choice for him, and so he offered the job to other directors first, feeling that he himself was not mature enough to do it ("Neeson's

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<sup>4</sup> I hasten to add, that this interpretation of the film is by no means absolute; rather it assumes that this movie fiction has a purpose, a point, without denying the possibility of other points or purposes. Neither does the moral dimension noted here constitute a universal claim about fiction. As Joseph H. Kupfer notes in his exploration of virtue in popular texts, certain movies "draw us to particular features of the narrative and orient us in one way rather than another in viewing" (338). In my analysis, the film's narrative seems to be leading us to such an interpretation, and it often seems that such an exploration leads "to an appreciation of detail, in the service of the larger meaning", without however forbidding the possibility of other, divergent interpretations (341).

*Schindler's List* Interview").<sup>5</sup> As Sterling notes, "[s]everal directors, such as Roman Polanski and Martin Scorsese, rejected the opportunity to make *Schindler's List* in part because they feared that the terrifying subject matter would render the film a commercial disaster" (62). Perhaps as a way of disassociating this project from mass profit and entertainment, Spielberg used all the royalties and residuals to fund the *Shoah Foundation*, a non-profit organization he created after the making of the film, which has filmed and preserved more than 52,000 testimonies of Holocaust survivors. As he says, "it's the only time I've made a movie where something better than the movie came along ... the *Shoah Foundation* was probably the reason the film was made and in that respect *Schindler's List* is the most important film I've ever made, and the *Shoah Foundation* ... is the most important work I've ever done inside the community" ("Spielberg on *Schindler's List*").

In the end this became for Spielberg an emotionally devastating experience: the recreation of this world through the *mise-en-scène* acquired its own threatening reality, while the "documentarian" stance he assumed moved him closer to the horrors of the subject matter ("Spielberg Talks about *Schindler's List*"). Although not the child of survivors, Holocaust stories were all around him growing up, and he remembers learning to count from the tattoos on the arms of survivors in his community and extended family ("Spielberg on *Schindler's List*"). The responsibility he felt as a Jewish artist marked his approach to the subject of the film, his emotion fueling his art ("Ben Kingsley Interview"). It seems that he understood this work as a duty to his family, to his own children, to honor and remember the dead, preserving their memory for future generations ("Steven Spielberg Shortly After"). And within this context of duty, it becomes important to interpret the film in moral terms. Carroll argues that "the moral experience that we have in respect to a narrative artwork is guided by the author of the story. There is a level of moral experience available from the narrative that depends on the guidance with which the author intends to provide us" (*Beyond Aesthetics* 288). This is by no means an effort to adopt a strict intentionalist view of art, but rather to place this film within the moral context of its creation.

For Spielberg, this film ended up being different from anything else he had made before. As he says, "you go to all my movies to be entertained but you go to this movie to be informed and I think to be changed." ("Spielberg Talks about *Schindler's List*"). For him one of the strongest messages of the story was that one does not have to be a saint to save the world, to save one life. And this message should become for the audience a moral turning point, the *raison d'être* for moral action. For Spielberg, the intriguing and paradoxical personality of Oscar Schindler, the war profiteer and Nazi who never bought into the prevalent *übertrennen* philosophy, became the "avenue into a subject that is otherwise too horrendous for words, let alone pictures" ("Spielberg Shortly After").

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<sup>5</sup> Neeson suggests in this interview that Spielberg had not really come to terms with his own heritage before embarking on this project.

This was not just another movie for Spielberg, but a moral tale that would educate the audience in perhaps the Aristotelian sense of edifying their minds and emotions in the hope of eliciting virtue. As he claims, “No one can do anything to fix the past. That has already happened. But a picture like this can impact us, delivering a mandate about what must never happen again” (“Production Notes”). It becomes important to underscore this moral function of the film narrative, especially in the context of Kupfer’s statement: “Movie fictions can be a basis for a new understanding of the world. Even when we look at them from an established viewpoint or ideology, the resulting interpretation can apply to actual experience in promising ways” (339).

### **The Morality of the Film**

In what follows I wish to interpret the film by considering two points of moral significance. Both can be understood as implications of the compelling criticism that Claude Lanzmann, the director of the documentary *Shoah*, voiced against Spielberg’s film. Lanzmann’s disagreement with *Schindler’s List*, as outlined in his article “Why Spielberg has Distorted the Truth,” touches upon many points of concern, and argues that the film tells the story of those saved, whilst ignoring the fate of the millions murdered. As he explains, “Spielberg could not tell Schindler’s story without also saying what the Holocaust was. And how could he do that by telling the story of a German who saved 1,300 Jews, since the overwhelming majority of Jews were not saved?” (14). This claim points to two important limitations. First, that you cannot tell the story of the Holocaust if you tell the story of those who lived and, second, that *Schindler’s List* is a story about the Holocaust despite its obvious focus on Schindler. In what follows I shall consider both these claims.

What is implied in Lanzmann’s view is that an artistic rendering of Schindler’s story is disrespectful to the dead. How is it possible, he asks, to tell the story of those saved without making the audience forget the countless who vanished? And yet, Spielberg manages to do that by structuring the movie through scenes that suggest the interchangeability of the survivors and the dead. Genia (Oliwia Dabrowska), the little girl with the red coat that inspires Schindler’s (Liam Neeson) moral awakening, survives the ghetto liquidation, but is later seen amongst a pile of dead bodies. Shortly after being rescued by Schindler, a one-armed worker is shot dead. The same fate meets Amon Goeth’s (Ralph Fiennes) stable boy, Lisiek (Wojciech Klata). After we see that most of the Schindler Jews have survived the medical examination at the concentration camp, there is a scene involving a group of more than 100 children walking towards their death. In this scene, Spielberg presents us with what must surely be one of the harshest scenes in the film, precisely because he intends to allow us no room to rejoice at the survival of the central (Jewish) characters. Likewise, in one of the most suspenseful moments of the film, the accountant Itzak Stern (Ben Kingsley), one of the three central characters of the story, is accidentally shipped to a death camp; Schindler’s managing to rescue him from a departing train at the very last minute makes the audience feel relief. Here indeed, we

witness an account of the Holocaust that focuses on a story of survival, momentarily leading us to forget all those not saved by Schindler. However, the minute that Stern is rescued, Spielberg turns our attention to the horrid scene that followed the departure of the trains: other prisoners and guards sorting out the items left behind by the departed (luggage, jewelry, photographs, glasses, religious items, clothes—even golden teeth) and determining their value. The horrible fate of those not rescued is highlighted in such a dramatic way that it is impossible for us to linger on Stern's survival.

In short, the film is structured so that Schindler's successful rescues are interspersed by shocking scenes of violence and death. As Spielberg claims, he wanted to portray how in these circumstances life was not guaranteed: "life was like a disposable napkin. Never knew when your time would come" ("Spielberg Talks about *Schindler's List*"). And it is in this sense that life and death receive equal space in the movie. If the movie organizes itself around Schindler's survivors, it does so against a backdrop of such devastating and irrational loss of life that the living are there to function as memorials to the dead.

The same aesthetic and narrative logic is followed in the scene after the women workers of Schindler's factory are rescued from Auschwitz.<sup>6</sup> After they arrive at the camp, we witness their terror as their hair is being cut, and they are forced to strip, and enter the gas chamber. Their screaming and wailing stops only when water drops from the showers instead of gas. A possible criticism here might be that the experience of the gas chamber becomes a spectacle, a cinematic tool for the creation of suspense, which ignores the fate of those who died violently within these same walls. And yet, as soon as the scene ends, Spielberg turns the camera on other prisoners being led to these chambers, and cuts to the smoking chimney of the camp that is spreading human ash everywhere. Again, we find our attention decentered, from the protagonists who survived to the anonymous masses that did not.

Anne Richardson makes a very good case for the emotional and moral subtext of this scene: "For Spielberg to show prisoners being gassed could be both imaginable and possible, yet he appears to set a moral representational limit for his film, in that it never moves beyond what can be shown or described in survivor testimony" (15). In other words, the moral limit placed here is the moral limit set by the survivors themselves: of never having been gassed themselves, but of witnessing others marching to their deaths. This is a point made even more interesting, if considered alongside this statement by an actual survivor, Rena Finder, one of the women workers in Schindler's factory: "if it wasn't for Oscar Schindler I would not be here... . Because of Oscar Schindler we have descendants and because of Oscar Schindler we are able to be witnesses, we are this link, the only living link between this horrible blackness that happened... . Those of us who are here we feel it is our duty ... to speak for those who cannot tell ... we are the living witnesses" ("*Schindler's List* Survivor Speaks Out"). And as living witnesses, they bear

the responsibility of their testimony, while observing the moral limitations of their own recollection.

This balancing between life and death is prominent in the ending scenes of the story as well. At the end of the war, when Schindler and the survivors prepare to go their separate ways, Schindler breaks down emotionally under the weight of the recognition that what he did could never be enough. The audience is thus reminded that Schindler's successes were no better than a few bucketfuls in an ocean. Therefore, our emotional engagement is not with the fortunate Schindler Jews alone. On the contrary, the audience is meant to realize that although these people lived, many more died. This scene is where the Hollywood happy ending should have happened. We should rejoice for the end of the war, the survival of the protagonists. But that does not seem to be all there is.<sup>7</sup>

It seems then, that Spielberg is orchestrating his effects and structuring his cinematic narrative in ways calculated to manipulate our emotions towards the characters and plot, by placing Schindler's story within the broader context of the Holocaust. In this way Spielberg crafts a work that engages our moral attention and reflection. This seems to be in line with Sinnerbrink's argument, that "cinema is a medium with the power to project and disclose virtual worlds; to engage our emotions, exercise our moral imaginations, and question our beliefs. It is a medium with the potential to evoke forms of ethical experience that might prompt a transformation of our horizons of meaning and value" (ch. 1). And by framing survival and death in such a way Spielberg manages to succeed in this direction: "I don't think there can ever be a film or a book or a television presentation or documentary that can represent the true, pure horror of the Shoah. Nothing can ever approximate it or even get close. But this film can at least get ... a sense of it ... . You should care about this film, if you care about people, if you care about humanity and if you care about the Holocaust ever happening again" ("Spielberg Talks about *Schindler's List*").

### The Children of the Story

As I claimed earlier, Lanzmann's criticism implies that, inevitably, this is also a film about the Holocaust, independently of the narrative's focus on Schindler. But this requires further consideration. In many ways, *Schindler's List* is a biopic, that is, a narrative about a real person's life. This means that it is a film, first and foremost, about Schindler's life, about Schindler the man. The Holocaust is the historical context within which Schindler operates; it is the backdrop of his story. But, one could ask, is it morally transgressive to place the Holocaust in such a narrative position? Does it not, due to its horrific reality, become the central point of focus, overpowering all else? This could be interpreted to mean that a biopic about Schindler's life is morally problematic because

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<sup>6</sup> This scene, based on a true story, was the subject of much debate. First, its authenticity was questioned because it mixes fact and fiction. Second, Holocaust deniers have used this scene as evidence that there was in fact no gassing in Auschwitz. For both see Sterling, and Marks and Torrey.



there can be no balance between the biopic's two aspects, that is, no balance between narrating a person's life, and depicting the historical context within which s/he operated.

But Schindler's story can be considered through a different moral perspective. As Sterling observes, Schindler "saved lives in the midst of the genocide. To risk one's life and to spend one's fortune in order to save the lives of more than a thousand helpless victims manifests the acts of a moral man, a hero with a conscience. Spielberg's decision to make Schindler the film's hero adheres to the concept of the Righteous Among Nations, which honours all those who altruistically rescued Jews" (67). Although Sterling here is debating Spielberg's choice to place a German at the heart of such a story, he notes the moral resonance that such a hero has. Indeed, there seems to be significant value in narrating Schindler's story and the message it holds: that of retaining your humanity no matter the circumstances; of recognizing the others' intrinsic value, regardless their identity markers; of fighting to preserve a future. And it is this future that has been guaranteed by Schindler's actions.

This is best displayed in the film through the use of children. Spielberg admits in interviews that he strongly identifies with the children's point of view; it is for him an easy and safe position to assume in the narrative ("Face to Face Steven Spielberg Part 2"). The symbolism of the children in this story is, of course, obvious: if the children survive there is a future. As Geoff Eley and Atina Grossmann have argued, children play a very big part in the story as we see them in all types of situations; in danger, hiding, surviving, singing, playing (55). They also exhibit all sorts of character traits: they are cunning, decisive, and mature beyond their years.<sup>8</sup> Although there are many examples of the children's agency in this film, it is interesting to compare the fate of two children, Genia and Olek, and their different moral narrative functions.

Genia is the little girl with the red coat—the only color we see in the otherwise black-and-white part of the film. The little girl, unnoticed by all, tries to escape the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto. Lost, innocent and vulnerable, she awakens Schindler to the horror that surrounds him. When he later sees her dead body being carried away, he realizes with a shock the need for action. Sterling explains this function of the little girl figure from an interesting perspective, arguing that "[t]he director inserts the red coat to instill horror in the audience so that they will comprehend the pain that Schindler witnesses and that incites his moral transformation. In this pivotal scene, Schindler becomes part of the audience while the audience, in turn, views the terror through his eyes" (68). From there on, Schindler starts seeing himself not only as a man of action, but also as an active protector of such children—of their future.

Interestingly, for Spielberg the girl with the red coat also functions as a metaphor for the passive role the allies maintained for a big part of the war. He argues that the red

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of this ending scene see also Manchel. Sterling also discusses the ending – but here the conclusion of the film (the return to color) is examined as a joyous ending.

<sup>8</sup> This might be the reason, as Eley and Grossman suggest, why Spielberg spares us from brutalising scenes of children—even the girl with the red coat is killed off-screen (55-6).

color makes her presence obvious and loud, yet none of the soldiers notices or pays attention to her as she is walking through the ghetto ("Spielberg on *Schindler's List*"). So in many ways, for Spielberg, Schindler is seeing the girl and acting upon his realization, when in fact the allies were slower to respond.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, Olek (Kamil Krawiec), the other child character, survives. We see him at Plaszow running away from the Nazis who are gathering up all the children to send them to their deaths. Everywhere he looks there are other children hiding. At one of the most desperate moments of the film, he jumps into a latrine, where again he is told to leave by other children already hidden there. The image of him looking up from a disgusting pool of urine and waste is one of pathos and horror. However, we do not learn of his fate until much later in the film. We are uncertain whether he has lived or has been captured until we see him stating his name to leave for safety with the other Schindler Jews. The very fact that he is alive highlights the emphasis Spielberg is placing on the need for a culture of moral awareness and action. Because Olek survives, we can envision a future for him, made possible by Schindler's actions.

Indeed, Spielberg's film is about Schindler, the moral hero: the protagonist able to defend humane values in a setting of horror and moral paralysis. Through Schindler, Spielberg invites the audience to engage and reflect. By choosing to make the film about Schindler, Spielberg bridges the present and the past, by focusing on good despite evil, and by showing that there is a way of moving forward, a way of creating a future despite tragedy. It is for this reason that the moral character of his actions takes centre stage in the narrative. Sinnerbrink argues that it is important to understand "how aesthetics and ethics are intimately and expressively related: how the particular aesthetic elements and features of a film are articulated with each other, and how these together serve to communicate ethical meaning via aesthetic means" (ch. 1). And it seems that Spielberg manages to communicate these messages through careful attention to the narrative structures and framing techniques, in this case in the way he decides to tell this story of these children in relation to Schindler's actions. Attention to Schindler's actions and the consequences of his actions become the moral compass of the story.

## Conclusion

It is often argued that cinema is one of the most influential artistic media of our times. This seems to be because it has the potential to create powerful narratives and to affect massive audiences. It has the power to influence and shape our views, to allow us to empathize and understand, to reaffirm or question our morality. It is no wonder then, that the cinematic medium, even since its early days, has been an important means of retelling and remembering events, and of narrativizing history.

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<sup>9</sup> Some critics have complained that Spielberg overdoses the protagonist with positive moral traits. Carroll, for instance, notes that since Schindler is established in the narrative as the moral hero quite early on, in later scenes the director "manhandles our emotions by trying to force us to accord Schindler a level of moral admiration that the character has already won from us" (*Beyond Aesthetics* 290).

*Schindler's List* is a film with an intense moral message; a film that requests the audience's moral attention through its formal and thematic characteristics. And it succeeds in the balance Spielberg finds between the aesthetic and moral imperatives of the story. Spielberg finds ways, through the structuring of the story, but also through the use of formal techniques, to instruct us of the past and the future. A future that seems real and important, just as much as the past has always been. For, it is not only our remembering of the past that matters, the film seems to be saying, but also the actions we engage in in the present.

Sinnerbrink relates ethics and aesthetics in the following way: "the role of aesthetic form in intensifying our experience, refining and focusing our attention, and thus of conveying complexity of meaning through manifold means—as a way of *evoking ethical experience* and thereby inviting further ethical-critical reflection" (ch. 1). If this is true, then Spielberg indeed manages to balance the aesthetic and moral demands of this narrative. Perhaps David Margolick summarizes it best in his review of the film "[w]hat *Schindler's List* has shown is that in the right hands—that is, hands sympathetic and scrupulous enough to care about authenticity and capable of making the fantastic credible—fiction can appear more real than reality. By adding plot and character and Itzhak Perlman's violin, by softening the horrid reality enough to keep it watchable, Mr. Spielberg seems to have made the Holocaust more accessible, believable and relevant to more people than ever before" ("Schindler's Jews Find Deliverance Again"). By shaping the formal elements in particular ways, he communicates a message about humanity and the strength of individual action, a message that seems to hold moral power and significance.

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### **Filmography**

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*Jacob the Liar*. Directed by Peter Kassovitz, Columbia Pictures, 1999.

*Jaws*. Directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1975.

*Jurassic Park*. Directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1993.

*Life Is Beautiful*. Directed by Roberto Benigni, Miramax Films, 1997.

*Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Directed by Steven Spielberg, Paramount Pictures, 1981.

*Schindler’s List*. Directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures, 1993.

*Shoah*. Directed by Claude Lanzmann, New Yorker Films, 1985.

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Directed by Mark Herman, Miramax, 2008.

*The Grey Zone*. Directed by Tim Blake Nelson, Lionsgate, 2001.

*The Pianist*. Directed by Roman Polanski, Focus Features, 2002.